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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002629

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: GOE BREAKS UP TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION  
CONFERENCE

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4(D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY A recent attempt by the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA), an organization claiming membership of three-quarters of Ethiopia's teachers, to hold a national conference was disrupted by Addis Ababa police. The ETA has historically been viewed as opposed to the ruling EPRDF, and has progressively seen its ability to operate diminished. This latest action may be the sign of GoE,s desire to limit ETA influence. As the new school year approaches, the government likely wishes to avoid political unrest such as that which occurred in 2005 and early 2006, much of which began in schools. END SUMMARY

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GOE BUSTS UP TEACHERS MEETING  
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12. (SBU) On August 30 the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) convened a three-day conference in Addis Ababa attended by leadership of the organization. However, during lunch on the first day, local police occupied the conference hall, preventing participants from reentering. Organizers were told by police that the gathering was considered illegal and that they would not be permitted to finish the remaining a two-and-a-half days of the conference. Participants, including several international guests, were prevented from gathering their effects from the hall. Police confiscated all materials at the site, including conference materials, luggage and personal belongings of participants, as well as an ETA automobile. Though most items were returned within a week, notes made by participants, photos, and much of the conference materials were destroyed.

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ORIGINAL, ETA AT ODDS WITH EPRDF SINCE DAY ONE  
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13. (SBU) The ETA is one of the oldest and largest civic or professional organizations in Ethiopia. It was originally formed in 1967 during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, and was granted an "indefinite registration." However, when the Derg regime was overthrown by the current ruling EPRDF, a new ETA was formed by individuals closely aligned with the incoming government. The original ETA was instructed to reregister their organization, but told it could not continue to use the ETA name. Legal battles between the "new" pro-EPRDF ETA and the "original" ETA over use of the name continue today. The original ETA has received favorable rulings in four consecutive lower court decisions, but the

matter has been appealed all the way to the Supreme Court by the new ETA and is not yet resolved. The original ETA maintains that its indefinite registration entitles it to use of the name.

14. (SBU) Despite the favorable rulings, the original ETA has faced harassment by the GoE and had property taken on several occasions. Until 1993, the original ETA received funding from membership fees automatically withdrawn from member teachers, salaries. The fees were placed in bank accounts under the ETA name. After the new ETA was formed, the original ETA was prohibited from using the bank accounts, which were turned over to the new ETA. Fees continued to be automatically withdrawn from teachers, salaries, regardless of whether they were members of the new ETA. The original ETA now receives financial support from donations from teachers, the Ethiopian diaspora, as well from the international community. The office headquarters of the original ETA have been sealed and property confiscated. The new ETA is suing the original ETA to have the property transferred to its control, but prolonged legal battles have left the offices deserted.

15. (SBU) The original ETA, which estimates its membership to include 120,000 of Ethiopia's 160,000 teachers, has long been seen by the GoE as closely aligned with opposition parties. In fact, the group's president, Dr. Taye Woldesemayat, as well as a member of the Addis Ababa chapter, Kassahun Kebede, are two of the defendants in the ongoing trial of Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) leaders accused of treason and attempted genocide following the November 2005 unrest in Addis Ababa. Dr. Taye is being tried in absentia, as he has taken refuge in the US.

ADDIS ABAB 00002629 002 OF 002

16. (SBU) Schools and universities in Ethiopia have historically been hotbeds of political opposition. Ethiopian teachers regularly receive political indoctrination by local governments in an attempt by the government to counteract the formation of anti-government student groups. Maintaining control of the teachers association is key in this effort.

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GOE FEARS STRIKE?  
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17. (C) The secretary general of the original ETA, Dr. Gemoraw Kassa, told Poloff on September 7 that since 2005 his organization has encountered problems with holding meetings. They planned to hold a meeting in April 2006 but were told by the Addis Ababa city administration that, as they didn't properly notify authorities, the conference was forbidden. Dr. Gemorwa said that such notification was not actually necessary according to the law, as professional associations are not required to file for permission to gather. Regardless, for the August 2006 conference, they submitted long in advance a request to the city administration, together with a planned agenda of the meeting. After the meeting was broken up on August 30, Dr. Gemoraw was informed that this was because his organization is "not officially recognized." He feels the actual reason the meeting was broken up is that the GoE feared that the original ETA had plans to call for a boycott of the upcoming academic year, a fear Dr. Gemoraw said was unfounded.

18. (SBU) On September 22, Poloff also met with the special advisor to the Director of the Addis Ababa Education Bureau, Hailemariam Teklewold. (NOTE: The Director declined requests for a meeting. END NOTE) He said that he heard about the ETA's conference interruption through reports on the radio, but knows nothing else about either the situation, or the original ETA. He claimed the city administration had nothing to do with it, as it is the federal Ministry of Justice that handles the registration of civic organizations. Currently, the two-week, pre-academic year teacher/administration

meetings are wrapping up and, when asked whether the original ETA had had contact and influence with teachers in Ethiopia during this period, Hailemariam, himself a teacher, said he didn't know. He pointed out however, that the city works only with the officially registered (pro-EPRDF) ETA, with which it regularly coordinates academic activity.

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COMMENT: OLD ETA AT THE END OF ITS LINE?  
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19. (C) Despite international support and the reported allegiance of the majority of the teachers in Ethiopia, the ETA formed in 1967 has diminishing space to operate. The original ETA has traditionally been sympathetic toward opposition political parties, making it a natural target for the EPRDF. A large, opposition-oriented group of teachers poses a potential threat the EPRDF-led government; following the widespread unrest begun in schools last year in the post-election period, the GoE is seeking to avoid organized disruptions as the new school approaches and local elections loom on the horizon. A decision by the Supreme Court in favor of the new pro-EPRDF ETA would likely signal the end of the road for the original ETA in its current form.  
HUDDLESTON